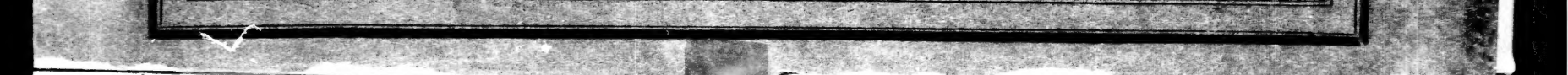

BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE.

USHER PARSONS' DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

RHODE-ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

Monday, February 16, 1852.

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DISCOURSE.

The Rhode Island Historical Society having requested me to prepare a discourse for this their anniversary public meeting, I have chosen for my subject a history of the Battle of Lake Erie.

I have made this choice, first because this battle is a part of Rhode-Island History, and therefore appropriate to the occasion; secondly, because I could speak of it from personal knowledge; and thirdly, because a very inaccurate and perverted account of it has been written and imposed upon the public by the late J. Fenimore Cooper, Esquire. I am aware that this gentleman's mistakes and misrepresentations should have been noticed and corrected before his decease, and my apology for the delay is, that I never saw the pamphlet containing them, nor knew of its existence, until within a few days past, and after commencing this discourse.

My aim will be to give an account of the origin of the fleet or squadron on the lake; of its conflict with the British squadron, of the consequences, immediate and remote, and in conclusion notice some of Mr. Cooper's erroneous positions and false inferences.

At the commencement of the war of 1812, Government undertook the conquest of Upper Canada. General Hull was at the head of an army at Detroit, and General Van Rensselaer of another on the Niagara river. The former was captured, and the latter defeated. At this time the British held possession of Lake Erie, with five armed vessels, and had captured the Adams, the only armed vessel we owned upon the Lake. Their vessels, carrying sailors and Indians, could at any moment strike a fatal blow upon any defenceless settlements on the South side of

the lake, and while the militia were gathering to oppose them they could pounce upon another and another. The surrender of Hull exposed the territory at the head of the lake to incursions by land, and an attempt to oppose them resulted in the capture of General Winchester's army. These three fruitless and disastrous expeditions taught the necessity of creating a fleet on Lake Erie, that should command it, and co-operate with General Harrison, who then commanded the North-Western army. Accordingly in the winter of 1812—13, the keels of five vessels were laid at Erie; at the same time four or five merchant-schooners, being all that were then owned by us on the lake, were purchased and armed with two or three guns each.

There are good reasons, I may here remark, for considering the operations on Lake Erie as part of Rhode-Island history. At the commencement of the war, there was a flotilla of gun-boats stationed at Newport for the protection of Narragansett Bay, which was commanded by Oliver H. Perry, a native of this State, then 27 years of age. The interruption of commerce by the war had thrown many captains, mates and seamen out of employ, who entered the public service in this flotilla. The service here being inactive, Perry volunteered for the lakes, and was ordered to superintend the out-fitting of the fleet at Lake Erie. He took with him many of the officers and seamen from Newport, and arrived at Erie in March, 1813. This accounts for there being so many Rhode-Islanders in the expedition. Four of the nine commanders, Perry, Turner, Champlin and Almy were from this State, also a majority of the sailing-masters and mates, and several other officers, with a large number of sailors. Besides this, Commodore Perry, Lieutenant Turner, late a post-captain, sailing-master Taylor, now a post-captain in Newport, superintended the rigging and equipping and arming of the fleet. There has never been an expedition set on foot in this country, where so large a portion of the officers hailed from one State, or accomplished so much work as was done by Rhode Islanders on Lake Erie.

In May 1813, Perry left Erie in a four-oared boat for Buffalo, where he arrived in twenty-four hours, the distance being 100 miles. From thence he proceeded to Lake Ontario, and there

rendered important services to Commodore Chauncy in the capture of Fort George. On his way there, he stopped at Black Rock, near Buffalo, to hasten the arming and outfitting of the five merchant schooners, and on his way back to Erie he took with him from Chauncy's fleet a few men, and borrowed two companies of infantry from the army, with which he manned the vessels and sailed to Erie. It was a Herculean labor to drag these vessels by land up the rapids at Black Rock into the Lake, and required nearly a week with two hundred men, who warped them with ropes over their shoulders. Soon after getting safely into the Lake off Buffalo, we sailed for Erie. On the day following, Captain Perry was taken down with fever. On the next succeeding day, a small boat with two men appeared under the lake-shore, rowing toward our vessels. They brought us intelligence from Erie that the enemy had just appeared there, and was probably in pursuit of us. Perry immediately took the deck, and gave orders to the other vessels to prepare for action, and to board the enemy should he come near us. Fortunately we were not discovered, and on the evening of the next day our little squadron entered Erie in safety.

No one who hears me can form any idea of the difficulties encountered in obtaining cordage, canvas, cannon, powder and balls, and all other outfits, which were to be brought to Erie mostly from the seaboard, a distance of four or five hundred miles, over bad roads. Notwithstanding under the direction of the Rhode Island officers, the work progressed rapidly and successfully. A regiment of Pennsylvania militia was tented on a ground near the shore where our fleet lay; and whenever the enemy looked in upon us, at the harbor of Erie, which they did every few days, this regiment of militia paraded, and made a formidable appearance upon the high bank of the lake, as a repelling force, but in reality, had the enemy approached to destroy our fleet, could have done little to prevent it. They however served as a sort of scare-crow, to frighten him away.

The enemy, on learning that a fleet was preparing to gain possession of the lake, had early in the spring laid the keel of a ship larger than had ever floated upon the lake, which added to their other vessels, made their fleet to consist of the following

force: Detroit, (new ship) nineteen guns, Queen Charlotte, seventeen guns, Lady Prevost, thirteen guns, Hunter, ten guns, Little Belt, three, and the Chippewa, one; total, sixty-three guns. The American force consisted of the following; Lawrence and Niagara, precisely alike, twenty guns each; Ariel, four, Scorpion, two, Porcupine, one, Tigris, one, Caledonia, three, Somers, two, Tripp, one; total, fifty-four guns.

The Fleet was manned by sailors partly from Newport, and partly from Lake Ontario. The two larger vessels, Lawrence and Niagara, were built and rigged precisely alike, and carried 132 officers and men each. By the 10th of July, the guns were mounted on board all the vessels, and the men were exercised at them several times a day.

On Sunday the 18th of July, two respectable missionaries who were passing through Erie, were invited by the Commodore on board one of the large ships, where as many officers and men as could be spared from all the vessels were assembled to hear prayers that were offered up for the success of the expedition. I shall never forget their fervent pleadings in our behalf, that we might subdue the hostile fleet, and thereby wrest from savage hands the tomahawk and scalping-knife, that had been so cruelly wielded against the defenceless settlers on the frontiers, and that in the event of a victory, mercy and kindness might be shown to the vanquished.

The bar of Erie had thus far served as a fortification to prevent the enemy from entering the harbor where our fleet was preparing, but it now presented a serious obstacle to our egress. The two large brigs drew three feet of water more than there was on the bar. On Sunday evening, the 1st of August, the work began of clearing the Lawrence of cannon and balls, to lighten her; and immense scows called camels were placed under her sides, and being sunk to the water's edge, timbers were passed through from side to side of the ship, the ends of which were blocked up, resting on these floating foundations. Plugs were now put into the scows, and the water bailed out, and as they rose they lifted the ship two feet, and this not being enough, the ballast and other heavy articles were taken out, till she was raised another foot, when she was able to pass over the bar.—

The Niagara was served in like manner, but the smaller vessels had previously passed over without the aid of camels. Before the large vessels were fairly over, the enemy hove in sight, and fired a few balls which did not reach us. The Pennsylvania regiment paraded, and the small vessels that were out returned the enemy's fire. Had they come near enough to do execution while we were struggling over the bar, they might have destroyed our fleet with little difficulty.

On the 6th of August we sailed, with the fleet not more than half officered and manned, across the lake, wishing to encounter the enemy before the large new ship joined his squadron, but they had sailed for Malden, and we returned to Erie the next day, where we found Captain Elliot just arrived from Lake Ontario, with nearly 100 officers and men. A new arrangement was now made of officers throughout the fleet, and we soon sailed up the lake in pursuit of the enemy, and anchored on the 15th in Put-in-bay, in a cluster of islands near the head of the lake. On the 17th we sailed to the mouth of Sandusky bay, and on anchoring fired three guns, waited ten minutes and fired three more. This was a signal previously agreed upon by letters that passed between Perry and Harrison. In the evening, Colonel Gaines with a number of officers and Indians arrived on board, and reported General Harrison to be twenty-seven miles distant, with an army of 8000 militia, regulars and Indians.—Our boats were sent to bring the General and his suite on board, where they arrived on the 19th, late in a rainy evening. The General brought his two aids, Colonel McArthur, afterwards Governor of Ohio, and Colonel Cass, now Senator in Congress, with many of his principal officers, two hundred soldiers and fifty Indians, including the chiefs of several nations. They remained on board with us two days, to settle the plans of their future operations. The General learned that our crews were weakened by sickness, and on returning to the army sent us some thirty or forty volunteers to serve with our sailors. Our crews became still more unhealthy, the Commodore and half of the officers were on the sick list with lake-fever. The two senior medical officers were confined to their berths, and the junior one was so reduced by the disease, that in visiting the

sick on board the different vessels, he was unable to climb up the ship's sides, and he was hoisted in and out like a barrel of flour or cask of water.

We now looked into the harbor of Malden, by way of returning the civilities the enemy had shown us at Erie. This kind of polite attention was repeated two or three times, until the evening of the 9th of September, when we anchored in Put-in-bay. On the following morning at sunrise, there was a cry from the mast-head, sail oh! all hands sprang from their berths, and ere we could dress and reach the decks the cry was repeated again and again, until six sail were thus announced. Signal was made to the fleet, "Enemy in sight! get under way!" and the hoarse voice and shrill pipe of the boatswain resounded through all the ships, all hands up anchor!

The wind at this time was from the Southwest, light and baffling, which prevented our weathering the island in our way, and it continued so until ten o'clock, when it veered to the Southeast, which enabled us to clear the island, and stand out upon the lake. We now discovered the English squadron, five or six miles to the leeward, hove to in a line, and equidistant about half a cable's length. The vessels were freshly painted, and with the morning sun shining upon their broadsides, and their red ensigns gently unfolding to the breeze, they made a very gallant appearance. Our squadron bore down to engage them, with the wind on our larboard quarter. They were arranged with the Chippewa, of one long eighteen pounder on a pivot ahead; the Detroit of nineteen guns, bearing the broad pendant of the Commodore, next; the Hunter of ten guns, the third; the Queen Charlotte of seventeen guns, fourth; the Lady Prevost of thirteen guns, fifth, and the Little Belt of three guns, sixth. Captain Perry immediately arranged his line of battle, with his own ship to fight the Detroit, broad pendant against broad pendant, Commodore against Commodore. Two gun-boats, the Ariel and Scorpion, ranged ahead on our larboard bow, a little out of a straight line. The Caledonia, of three long twenty-four pounders, came next, after the Lawrence, to encounter the Hunter; the Niagara next, to fight the Queen Charlotte, and the Somers, Porcupine, Tigris and Tripp, to en-

counter the Lady Prevost and Little Belt. Thus arranged, our fleet moved on to attack the enemy, distant at ten o'clock about four or five miles. The Commodore next produced the burgee, or fighting flag, hitherto concealed in the ship. It was inscribed with large white letters on a blue ground, that could be read throughout the fleet, "DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP," the last words of the expiring Lawrence, and now to be hoisted at the mast-head of the flag-ship bearing his name. A spirited appeal was made to the crew assembled upon the quarter-deck, who returned three hearty cheers that were repeated along the whole line of our vessels, and up went the flag to the top of the fore-royal. The Commodore brought me a package of papers, having a piece of lead attached to them, and gave orders in the event of his falling, to throw the papers overboard; they were instructions from Government, and letters from Mrs. Perry.—The grog ration being served out, drums and fifes struck up the thrilling air, "all hands, all hands, all hands to quarters," calling all to their respective stations. The Commodore was on the quarter deck with two young officers, Thomas Breese and his own brother, Alexander Perry, whose duty it was to run with his orders to every part of the ship, for in the din and uproar of battle no officer can be heard ten feet off. The hatches were now closed excepting a small aperture ten inches square, through which powder-cartridges were to be passed up from the magazine by boys nimble of foot during the battle, and through which light was admitted into the surgeon's room, where the wounded were to be brought. The floor of this apartment was on a level with the surface of the water outside, and consequently the wounded were as much exposed to the enemy's cannon balls as if they were on deck. Six men were directed to bring the wounded below, and to assist the surgeon in moving them.

Every preparation being made, and every man at his post, a profound silence reigned for more than one hour, the most trying part of the whole scene. It was like the stillness of the atmosphere that precedes the hurricane, while the fleet moved on steadily till a quarter before meridian, when the awful suspense was relieved by a cannon-shot aimed at us from the flag-ship Detroit, one mile distant. It was like an electric shock, and

was soon followed by another. The two gun-boats ahead of us now fired one or two long guns. At this time the Ariel, Scorpion, Lawrence, Caledonia and Niagara were all in their respective stations in the order they are named, distant from each other about half a cable's length. The other vessels not sailing quite so well were a little out of their stations astern. At ten minutes before twelve, fire was opened from all the long guns of the enemy. At five minutes before meridian, the Lawrence beginning to suffer, returned the fire from her long bow gun, a twelve pounder, when the two gun-boats ahead were ordered by trumpet, to commence the action, and the Caledonia and Niagara astern, opened their fire with their long guns. The sternmost vessels soon after opened also, but at too great a distance to do much injury. Perry finding himself not sufficiently near to do execution with his carronades, made all sail again, and ordered the word to be passed by trumpet to the vessels astern. The order was responded to and transmitted along the line by Captain Elliot of the Niagara, whose vessel was stationed next but one astern of the Lawrence. But the Niagara did not make sail with the Lawrence, and accompany her down into close action as ordered, but continued her long shot with two bow guns, (having shifted the left one over to the starboard side.) Perry pressed on, and supposing himself near enough, fired his forward carronades, but finding they did not tell, he pressed on still nearer, suffering terribly, and getting near enough for execution he opened a rapid and most destructive fire upon the Detroit. The Scorpion and Ariel ahead were not deemed worthy of the enemy's aim, yet those small vessels having heavy cannon fought nobly and with great effect. The Caledonia astern followed the Lawrence into close action against her antagonist the Hunter. But the Niagara, which, when the battle began was within hail of the Lawrence, did not follow her down toward the enemy's line,so as to encounter her antagonist the Queen Charlotte. The Niagara, I say, did not make sail when the Lawrence did, but hung back for two hours, when she should have followed the example of the Lawrence, and grappled with the Queen Charlotte at the same time that vessel did the Detroit. The Queen was expecting it, but as her antagonist did not

come up, she shot ahead to fire upon the Lawrence, and in so doing she passed the Hunter, that had been ahead between her and the Detroit. After a lapse of two hours Elliot filled his sails and came up, the Caledonia moved on towards the Hunter, which had now dropped astern and to the leeward of the Queen. Elliot in order to approach the Queen must pass the Caledonia, which he did to the windward or outside of her, and was approaching the Lawrence, which however was crippled and was dropping astern a perfect wreck. Elliot then, instead of passing directly down to engage the Queen, luffed to the windward to go round and outside of the Lawrence, and while abreast of her larboard beam, and nearly half a mile distant, Perry left the Lawrence for the Niagara in a boat, and boarded her when she had reached a little ahead of the Lawrence on her larboard bow. The Lawrence now hauled down her flag and ceased firing. Perry sent Elliot to the small vessels astern to bring them up, and turning his ship's head eight points towards the enemy's line, making a right angle in her course, he went within pistol-shot of the Detroit's bow, and took a raking position. The Detroit in attempting to wear to bring her broadside to her, fell on board the Queen Charlotte, and gave Perry a chance to rake both ships, which he did so effectually that in five minutes they hauled down their colors. Perry now shot further ahead near the Lady Prevost, which from being crippled in her rudder, had drifted out of her place to the leeward, and was pressing forward toward the head of the line to support the two ships. Perry gave her a broad-side which silenced her battery. The Hunter next struck, and the two smaller vessels attempted to escape, but were overhauled by the Scorpion and Tripp, and thus ended the action at near four o'clock, P. M.

Let us now advert for a moment to the scenes exhibited in the flag-ship Lawrence. The wounded began to come down before the Lawrence opened her battery, and for one I felt impatient at the delay. In proper time however as it proved, the dogs of war were let loose from their leash, and it seemed as though heaven and earth were at logger-heads. For more than two long hours, little could be heard but the deafening thunders of our own broad-sides, the crash of balls dashing through our

timbers, and the shrieks of the wounded. These were brought down faster than I could attend to them, farther than to stay the bleeding, or support the shattered limbs with splints, and pass them forward upon the berth deck. Two or three were killed near me, after being wounded. I well remember the complaints that the Niagara did not come up. "Why does she hang back so, out of the battle?" Among those early brought down was Lieutenant Brooks, son of the late Governor Brooks, of Massachusetts, a most accomplished gentleman and officer; and renowned for personal beauty. A cannon-ball had struck him in the hip, he knew his doom, and inquired how long he should live; I told him a few hours. He inquired two or three times how the day was going, and expressed a hope that the Commodore would be spared. But new-comers from deck brought more and more dismal reports, until finally it was announced that we had struck. In the lamentations of despair among the wounded, I lost sight of poor Brooks for a few minutes, but when the electrifying cry was heard that the enemy's two ships had struck, I rushed on deck to see if it were true, and then to poor Brooks to cheer him, but he was no more,—he was too much exhausted by his wounds to survive the confusion that preceded this happy transition.

When the battle had raged an hour and a half, I heard a call for me at the small sky-light, and stepping toward it I saw it was the Commodore, whose countenance was as calm and placid as if on ordinary duty. "Doctor," said he, "send me one of your men," meaning one of the six that were to assist me, which was done instantly. In five minutes the call was repeated and obeyed, and at the seventh call I told him he had them all. He asked if any could pull a rope, when two or three of the wounded crawled upon deck to lend a feeble hand in pulling at the last guns.

When the battle was raging most severely, Midshipman Lamb came down with his arm badly fractured; I applied a splint and requested him to go forward and lie down; as he was leaving me, and while my hand was on him, a cannon-ball struck him in the side, and dashed him against the other side of the room, which instantly terminated his sufferings. Charles Pohig, a

Narragansett Indian, who was badly wounded, suffered in like manner.

There were other incidents that were less painful to witness. The Commodore's dog had secreted himself in the bottom of the closet containing all our crockery. A cannon-ball passed through the closet, and smashed crockery and door, covering the floor with fragments. The dog set up a barking protest against the right of such an invasion of his chosen retirement.

Lieutenant Yarnel had his scalp badly torn, and came below with the blood streaming over his face; some lint was hastily applied and confined with a large bandanna, with directions to report himself for better dressing after the battle, and he insisted on returning to the deck. The cannon-balls had knocked to pieces the hammocks stowed away on deck, and let loose their contents, which were reed or flag tops, that floated in the air like feathers and gave the appearance of a snow-storm. These lighted upon Yarnel's head covered with blood, and on coming below with another injury, his bloody face covered with the cat tails made his head resemble that of a huge owl. Some of the wounded roared out with laughter that the devil had come for us.

The hard fighting terminated about three o'clock. As the smoke cleared away the two fleets were found completely mingled, the small vessels astern having come up to the others.—The shattered Lawrence lying to the windward was once more able to hoist her flag, which was cheered by a few feeble voices on board, making a melancholy sound compared with the boisterous cheers that preceded the battle.

The proud though painful duty of taking possession of the conquered ships was now performed. The Detroit was nearly dismantled, and the destruction and carnage had been dreadful. The Queen was in a condition little better. The whole number killed in the British fleet was forty-one, and of wounded ninety-four. Every commander and second in command, says Barclay in his official report, was either killed or wounded. In our fleet were twenty-seven killed, and ninety-six wounded; of the twenty-seven killed, twenty-two were on board the Lawrence, and of the ninety-six wounded, sixty-one were on board this same ship, making eighty-three killed and wounded out of

one hundred and one reported fit for duty in the Lawrence on the morning of the battle., On board the Niagara were two killed and twenty-three wounded, making twenty-five ; and out of these twenty-five, twenty-two were killed or wounded after Perry took command of her.

After four o'clock, a boat was discovered approaching the Lawrence. Soon the Commodore was recognized in her, who was returning to resume the command of his tattered ship, determined that the remnant of her crew should have the satisfaction of witnessing the formal surrender of the British officers. It was a time of conflicting emotions when he stepped upon deck ; the battle was won and he was safe, but the deck was slippery with blood, and strewn with the bodies of twenty officers and men, some of whom had set at table with us at our last meal, and the ship resounded everywhere with the groans of the wounded. Those of us who were spared and able to walk, met him at the gangway to welcome him on board, but the salutation was a silent one on both sides ; not a word could find utterance.

And now the British officers arrived, one from each vessel, to tender their submission and with it their swords. "When they had approached, picking their way among the wreck and carnage of the deck, they held their swords with the hilts towards Perry, and tendered them to his acceptance. With a dignified and solemn air, the most remote possible from any betrayal of exultation, and in a low tone of voice, he requested them to retain their side-arms, inquired with deep concern for Commodore Barclay and the wounded officers, tendering to them every comfort his ship afforded," and expressing his regret that he had not a spare medical officer to send them, adding that he had only one on duty for the fleet, who had his hands full.

Among the ninety-six wounded there occurred three deaths; a result so favorable was attributable to the plentiful supply of provisions brought off from the Ohio shore, to fresh air, the wounded being ranged under an awning on the deck until we arrived at Erie ten days after the action, and also to the devoted attention of Commodore Perry to every want.

Those who were killed in the battle were committed to the

deep at night-fall, the Episcopal service being read over them. On the following morning, the two fleets sailed into Put-in-bay, where the slain officers were buried on shore. The scene was a solemn one. Equal respect was paid to the slain of the two fleets. Minute-guns were fired from the fleet, a martial band preceded performing a funeral dirge, and the corpses were ranged in alternate order of American and British, and the procession followed in like order to the graves, where the funeral service was read. A striking contrast this to the scene presented two days before, when both the living and the dead now forming this solemn and fraternal train were engaged in fierce and bloody strife, hurling at each other the thunder-bolts of war.—When will Christian nations learn to act like consistent Christians?

On the 8th day after the action, the Lawrence was despatched to Erie with the wounded, where we received a cordial welcome and kind hospitality. The remainder of the fleet conveyed Harrison's army to Malden, and some of the vessels ascended the Detroit river. Harrison found the army of General Proctor had gone, after burning the public stores, and had retreated toward the Thames. Perry joined Harrison as a volunteer aid, and our troops pursued, overtook and captured the army, the only army that was captured during the war. Proctor escaped, his companion Tecumseh, there is every reason to believe was killed, since a dozen persons claim the honor of firing the fatal ball. Perry then accompanied Harrison and Commodore Barclay to Erie, where they landed amid peals of cannon and the shouts of the multitude. Perry thence returned to Newport, receiving on his way the acclamations of a grateful people in every city and village through which he passed.

In reviewing the incidents of the battle, we must admit that in several particulars the enemy had hard luck, which contributed to their defeat and capture. The wind turned in our favor before the action began. The Commanders of their two vessels were killed or severely wounded early; the rudder of the Lady Prevost was disabled, which caused her to drift out of the line; and worse than this, the running of the Queen against the Detroit, which prevented her wearing, and exposed both ships to a

raking fire from the thirty-two pound carronades of the Niagara, a fresh ship, and in prime order,—all helped to turn the day in our favor. To this it should be added that the enemy were just out of port, and had not been training their guns daily for weeks, as our men had done, which enabled them to load and fire with astonishing frequency.

Immediately after the battle, the Commodore despatched to General Harrison the following note: "Dear General, We have met the enemy and they are ours, two ships, two brigs, one sloop and one schooner," adding in a postscript, send us some soldiers to help take care of the prisoners, who are more numerous than ourselves. At the same time he announced the victory to the Secretary of the Navy in the following words. "It has pleased the Almighty to give to the arms of the United States a signal victory over their enemies on this lake. The British squadron, consisting of two ships, two brigs, one sloop and one schooner, have this moment surrendered to the force under my command after a sharp conflict."

And now followed the more difficult task of making out a detailed report, in which Perry must speak of the conduct of the principal deck-officers of the fleet; a task that was quite as perplexing to him as the fighting of the battle had been.

The officers of the small vessels came on board the Lawrence on the second evening from the battle, and all of them, without exception, expressed but one opinion of the conduct of Elliot, in keeping out of the battle, that he held back more than two hours from engaging his antagonist the Queen, that when the Lawrence was much crippled and began to drop astern, the Niagara then came up abreast of her, not between her and the enemy, but far away outside, much farther from the Lawrence than the Lawrence was from the enemy, that Perry at this moment having fought his own ship to the last, entered a boat with five men, and rowed to the Niagara, and by the time he reached her she was on the larboard bow of the Lawrence, from a third to half a mile distant. That he immediately despatched Captain Elliot to the stern vessels, and turned the Niagara's head toward the enemy, so as to make nearly a right angle with the course she had been steering, and crossing the line the Lawrence

was steering, about sixty yards ahead of her, came within pistol-shot of the enemy's flag-ship Detroit. These facts every officer agreed to, and the log-book of the Lawrence, written up on the evening of the battle, and which is the best official document that could be furnished, states them in about so many words.

Nor did any one suppose that Elliot or any of his officers would take any ground contrary to these facts. But Elliot perceived their bearing, and, to save himself, began to pay court to Perry. He took to his bed and sent for Dr. Parsons to visit him on the second day after the battle, who could discover no positive disease upon him. He spoke disparagingly of his Surgeon, remarking that he was sick, and if well was good for nothing, and requested Dr. Parsons to attend his wounded, who replied that Dr. Barton was a good Surgeon, and in a few days would be able to return to duty. The wounded were however all removed on board the Lawrence, now made a general hospital ship, to be sent to Erie. Elliot also sent for Perry while thus *confined to his bed*, when he expressed to him his regret that he had not entered earlier into the action, extolled Perry's conduct and offered some lame excuse for his own; and this insinuating course induced Commodore Perry, under the generous impulses of his nature, to try to save him. Perry knew that the officers of all the vessels of the fleet, except the Niagara, had expressed their opinion against Elliot; and fearing that their letters to their friends might ruin him, he sent two confidential persons, Messrs. Hambleton and Turner, to all the fleet, to say that he, Perry, though not satisfied with Elliot's conduct, wished to save him, and requested that they would be silent respecting the fact of his keeping out of battle for more than two hours, adding that there was honor enough gained for the fleet to enable it to save Elliot. They all but one complied with this request, but some of the volunteers from the army were not applied to, and some of their letters, with one from Yarnel escaped, in which Elliot's conduct was condemned.

Of course when Perry's official report appeared in print, the officers of the Lawrence were dissatisfied at his saying so much in favor of Elliot. They had expected that he would not speak of him at all. But Perry had resolved to save him from

public censure, and therefore says in his report, "at half-past two, the wind springing up, Captain Elliot was enabled to bring his vessel gallantly into close action. I immediately went on board of her, when he anticipated my wishes by volunteering to bring up the schooners into close action." (*See Appendix.*)

Beside this desire to save Elliot, Perry was unwilling that the enemy should know that the second in command in our squadron had failed in his duty. In expressing his doubts to Mr. Hambleton, his confidential friend, at the time of drawing up the report, he quoted with approbation the declaration of an English admiral. "It is better to screen a coward, than to let the enemy know there is one in the fleet."

Perry before signing his official report, allowed Elliot to see what he had written, with which he expressed himself as satisfied. But the stubborn fact there stated, that "at half-past two the wind springing up enabled him to bring his ship gallantly into action," coupled with the inquiry which he foresaw the public would naturally make, why he did not advance to his station when the Lawrence pushed forward into hers, both ships being in all respects alike, and having the same wind,—this stared him in the face. He applied to Perry to vary that statement in some way, so as to screen him. He also immediately and secretly drew certificates from his own officers, showing that he had done his duty, which as they belonged to the ship whose reputation seemed to involve their own, under the moulding influence which a commander always has over his officers, they were prevailed upon to sign. This was an advantage which Perry did not avail himself of; for very soon after the battle he left the fleet for home, unconscious that Elliot was busily at work in obtaining certificates from his officers. When the certificates of the Lawrence's officers were obtained some years after, not one of them was under Perry's command.

At the same time that Elliot was obtaining these certificates he was making artful appeals to Perry for stronger expressions of praise upon his conduct. On the 18th of September, he said in a note to Perry, that his reputation was suffering in the neighborhood of his family, and requested a written statement from him as to his conduct in the battle. Perry, not knowing the

insidious course that Elliot was pursuing toward him, wrote a very favorable letter, supposing he wished to send it to his family; doubtless he was irritated by the thought that his wish to save Elliot had been frustrated. He expressed himself as being dissatisfied and vexed at being thwarted in his determined purpose, and in this state of mind, and moved by the pathetic appeal of Elliot he wrote him the following letter.

"SEPT. 19, 1813.

"DEAR SIR,

I received your note last evening after I had turned in, or I should have answered it immediately. I am indignant that any report should be in circulation prejudicial to your character, as respects the action of the 10th instant. It affords me pleasure that I have it in my power to assure you, that the conduct of yourself, officers, and crew was such as to meet my warmest approbation. And I consider the circumstance of your volunteering and bringing the smaller vessels into closer action, as contributing largely to our victory. I shall ever believe it a premeditated plan of the enemy to disable our commanding vessel, by bringing all their force to bear upon her; and I am satisfied, had they not pursued their course, the engagement would not have lasted thirty minutes. I have no doubt, if the Charlotte had not made sail and engaged the Lawrence, the Niagara would have taken her in twenty minutes.

Respectfully, &c.

O. H. PERRY."

This may be regarded as a rope thrown to a drowning man, but which instead of saving Elliot enabled him to pull Perry overboard.

In a letter to his friend Hambleton, a few months after, when he heard of Elliot's intrigues, Perry says, "I was sensible on reflection, I had already said too much in my official report."—"Subsequently I became involved in his snares; and on his writing me a note of which he has published only a part, I was silly enough to write him in reply the foolish letter of the 19th of September, because I thought it necessary to persevere in endeavoring to save him." "This undoubtedly reflects on my head, but not on my heart. I was willing enough to share with him and others the fame I had acquired." Again he says, "It was a matter of great doubt when I reflected upon Elliot's conduct, to what to attribute his keeping so long out of action."—"I did not then know enough of human nature to believe that any one could be so base as to be guilty of the motive which some ascribed to him, namely, a determination to sacrifice me by keeping his vessel out of the conflict."

Learning that Elliot persisted in his intrigues, aiming to elevate himself at the expense of his Commander who had endeavored to save him, Perry spoke of him as one who would find it for his interest to say less about Lake Erie, as he would injure himself by bringing before the public eye a different and truer representation of his conduct than had hitherto been given. Some of his remarks of this nature reached Elliot's ear, upon which he sent Perry a challenge with an insulting note, who responded that he would be entitled to a meeting when he had cleared himself from the charges about to be forwarded to the Secretary of the Navy. Accompanying the charges was a letter from Perry, explanatory of his whole course of action towards Captain Elliot from and after the battle, a few extracts from which are inserted. He says, "At the moment of writing my Official Report I did in my own mind avoid coming to any conclusion to what cause the conduct of Captain Elliot was to be imputed: Nor was I then fully acquainted with all the circumstances relating to it." * * "I was, after the engagement commenced, necessarily too much engaged in the actual scene before me, to reflect deliberately upon the cause which could induce Captain Elliot to keep his vessel so distant both from me and the enemy. And, after the battle was won, I felt no disposition rigidly to examine into the conduct of any of the officers of the fleet; and, strange as the behavior of Captain Elliot had been, yet I could not allow myself to come to a decided opinion."

"The subsequent conduct also of Captain Elliot; the readiness with which he undertook the most minute services; the unfortunate situation in which he now stood, which he lamented to me, and his marked endeavors to conciliate protection, were calculated to have their effect. But, still more than all, I was actuated by a strong desire that, in the fleet I then had the honor to command, there should be nothing but harmony after the victory had been gained, and that nothing should transpire which would bring reproach upon any part of it, or convert into crimination the praises to which it was entitled, and which I wished all to share and enjoy. The difficulties produced in my mind by these considerations were, at the time, fully expressed to an officer of the fleet, in whom I had great confidence. If I omit-

ed to name Captain Elliot, or named him without credit, I might not only ruin that officer, but at the same time give occasion to animadversions which, at that period, I thought would be little to the honor or advantage of the service. If my Official Report of that transaction is reverted to, these embarrassments with respect to Captain Elliot, under which I labored in drawing it, will, I believe, be apparent. That report was very different from what had been expected by the officers of the fleet; but, having adopted the course which I thought most prudent to pursue with regard to Captain Elliot, I entreated them to acquiesce in it, and made every exertion in my power to prevent any farther remarks on his conduct, and even furnished him with a favorable letter or certificate for the same purpose, of which he has since made a very unjustifiable use." These extracts are inserted out of their place, in order to show what Perry's opinion of him was during the five years after he left Lake Erie.

Perry's life was saved amid the carnage of his own ship, and he was enabled to come off victorious in the fresh ship which Elliot had reserved from danger, in order that he might pluck the laurels with his own hand. The conduct of Elliot, although it doomed the Lawrence to a dreadful slaughter and prolonged the conflict, was not after all an unmixed evil in its consequences. The Niagara was in perfect order for Perry when he boarded her, and in much better condition than she could have been had she engaged her antagonist early in the fight.

There is probably not to be found in the history of naval warfare an instance where the heroism of one man has shone with such transcendent lustre over all others, as that of Perry in the battle of Lake Erie. After fighting his own ship till eighty-three were killed or wounded out of one hundred and one, he goes to a fresh ship of the same size having only three men injured, and takes her into the thickest of the fight, and in seven minutes adds twenty-two to the list, making one hundred and five killed and wounded on the decks on which he stood, while the whole number injured on the deck where Elliot stood was but three. Then as one hundred and five is to three, so was the danger to which Perry was exposed, compared with Elliot's exposure.

On the other hand, there is no other instance on record where the second in command has done so little to secure a victory.— Elliot arrived on the lake after the labor of building, arming, rigging, and equipping the fleet, a most difficult and perplexing task, had been performed by Perry, Turner and Taylor of Rhode-Island. He sails at once in a ship of the same size and model and armament, as the flag-ship. Instead of engaging his antagonist as ordered, he hangs back, firing one or two long bow guns, which were the only ones that could reach his antagonist; he hugs the wind, going far away outside of the line,— he then leaves her with only three men injured, to bring up the dull-sailing vessels in the rear, which with the aid of sweeps, they had nearly done of themselves before he reached them; — he was probably about as long a time in rowing to these several vessels as Perry was in reaching the Detroit within pistol distance; — the victory was gained in a few minutes after, and there was no one injured in the small vessels while he, Elliot, was on board of them.

Prejudiced if not hireling writers, among whom was the late J. Fenimore Cooper, whose Naval History contains many mistakes and mis-statements, have endeavored to retrieve Elliot's reputation by asserting that the friends of Perry were not reliable witnesses in the case. He intimates that Dr. Parsons' testimony shows a strong bias against Elliot, because he testifies some years after the battle, that when called on board the Niagara to attend their wounded two days after the action, (their surgeon being sick) he inquired at what time in the action they were wounded. Cooper wished to convey the idea that the Doctor was actuated in this inquiry of the wounded by a desire to draw from them evidence against Elliot. Now it happens that the Doctor's motive for making the inquiry was altogether foreign from what Cooper has falsely imputed. He had not the most distant idea of ever being called upon for a written or even a verbal statement relating to the matter. His motive was this, and only this. The wounded of the Niagara had lain more than forty hours with their wounds undressed, and each one was impatient and clamorous for first attendance. But as he could not dress all at once, it was necessary to adopt some rule

that should be equitable, and stop their clamor for some hours; and this rule was, to take them in the order of succession in which they fell; and in making the inquiry who were first wounded, two reported themselves as wounded before Perry came on board. Others would have reported in like manner if they could have done it, but it was conceded by all that these two were entitled to first attendance, because they were wounded before Elliot left the ship, and no others made any such pretension. It was necessary to adopt the same rule of succession in the Lawrence the day previous, and he so stated the fact in a surgical account of the battle published soon after it took place, and before the controversy between Perry and Elliot appeared before the public. Was it fair and honorable in Cooper to assign false motives for his conduct in this matter, merely for the purpose of bolstering the reputation of Elliot?

Again, Cooper intimates that the testimony of several officers in favor of Perry should be received with much caution; that Messrs. Parsons, Breese, Taylor, Champlin and Brownell appear to have been natives of Rhode-Island, and to have accompanied Perry when he left the State, that they were consequently partisan witnesses, and not entitled to confidence. Now it happens that Dr. Parsons never saw Rhode-Island, nor a Rhode-Island citizen until he met these gallant fellows on the Lake, although Cooper reiterates the charge not less than five times in the pamphlet. Not one of these officers was ever requested by Perry or any other person to express an opinion respecting the battle, during the five years next after it occurred, and not even then while under his command and influence; whilst the certificates of the officers of the Niagara, Elliot hastened to obtain immediately after the action, and when the certifiers were under his command, and subject to his capricious discipline. Their ship being in bad odor with the public, (although their own good conduct had never been questioned,) it was natural that they should endeavor to place her commander's conduct, before Perry boarded her, in as favorable a light as possible. Elliot began his intrigues with them by representing to Purser Magrath and Sailing-master Webster, that but for his own exertions and intercessions they would not have been mentioned in Per-

ry's official report of the action. Magrath too had about this time sent an insulting message to Perry, who had given him an order to execute as Purser, to which he replied that he was not Commodore Perry's lackey. For this disrespect to his commander he was arrested, but after making a suitable apology, he was restored to duty.

You will perceive then the origin of Magrath's vindictive course toward Perry. While smarting under the thought of his arrest, and the irritation which Elliot's remarks occasioned, this file-leader of his certifiers, wrote the letter extolling Elliot, to the Secretary of the Navy,— a distorted version of the battle published in the Erie Gazette,—his own certificate, and last but not least, the congratulatory address of the Niagara's officers to Elliot. But after a few months' calm reflection Mr. Magrath said in my hearing that he wished his fingers had been cut off before he signed those papers; and Mr. Brownell testifies under oath that he wished his hand had been cut off first. A few months later Magrath disobeyed an order from Commodore Sinclair, for which he was required to deliver up his commission as purser and to leave the service; which he did, and a few weeks after he blew his brains out. Such was the end of the principal witness and prime actor in favor of Elliot; yet Mr. Cooper extols him without stint, as the most reliable witness in the whole controversy.

In like manner, Lieutenant Conklin, the only commander of the small vessels from whom Elliot's importunity drew a certificate in his favor, expressed regret months afterward in my hearing, that he had ever given it, stating that it was obtained under the plea that it was to be shown to Mrs. Elliot and other relatives only, who had heard unfavorable reports of his conduct.— This gentleman was afterwards dismissed from the service on the charge of intemperance. The other Commanders of the small vessels expressed opinions against Elliot, most of them under oath. Thus you will perceive that the testimony of the Commanders of the small vessels was in favor of Perry and against Elliot.

Cooper represents Dr. Parsons several times as a partisan witness. "Two accounts" he says "of the loss of the Niagara

have been given; that of the official report and that of her own Surgeon. The former was based on returns made to Elliot by Dr. Parsons, and that he endeavors to lessen the loss of this brig, under the influence he so early manifested," (meaning, in questioning the wounded as to the time they were struck.)*

Mr. Cooper's calumny, of making out a fraudulent return of the number of killed and wounded in the Niagara for the purpose of disparaging Captain Elliot is easily disposed of by simply stating the fact that those returns were made out, not by Dr. Parsons, but by Purser Magrath of the Niagara, one of Elliot's officers and leading certifiers, and is still preserved in his hand writing.

Mr. Cooper is not satisfied with imputing to Dr. Parsons the base design of trying to injure Captain Elliot, when he inquired of the wounded of the Niagara, the time they were struck in the action, (merely for the purpose of settling their priority of claims for surgical aid) which he reiterates over and over; nor with asserting, in five different places in his abusive pamphlet, that the Doctor was a native of Rhode-Island and therefore prejudiced in favor of Perry and not reliable, (when he had never seen Rhode-Island;) nor with charging him with making out a false return of the number of wounded, (which Magrath made out,) but he moreover adds, "nor is Dr. Parsons' affidavit uncontradicted by even Perry himself. He says that the wounded from the first of their coming down, complained that the Niagara, commanded by Captain Elliot, did not come up to her station, and close with the Charlotte although he had been ordered by signal; and this complaint was frequently repeated by them until the Lawrence struck, and repeated by Lieutenants Brooks, Yarnell, and Claxton." Perry in his official letter says, "Lieutenant Yarnel, first of the Lawrence, though several times wounded refused to quit the deck." Here he flatly contradicts Dr. Parsons's affidavit." Now the reader will remember the anecdote, how Yarnell came below with bleeding head,

* Dr. P. states in his affidavit: "The second day after the action I attended the wounded of the Niagara, the surgeon of that vessel being sick; and out of twenty cases, not more than one or two said they were wounded while Captain Elliot was on board the ship. On board all the small vessels which Captain Elliot brought up, the wounded did not exceed two or three."

which, after returning to the deck, was covered with cat-tails, and made him resemble an owl. Obviously Captain Perry's meaning was that he did not leave the deck permanently although repeatedly wounded. Can a more contemptible quibble be conceived of than Cooper has here resorted to for the purpose of invalidating testimony given under oath? Was it incumbent on Captain Perry in order to satisfy Mr. Cooper's taste to specify that Yarnell was absent a few moments, two or three times from the deck for surgical aid during a bloody action which lasted nearly three hours? Was Dr. Parsons bound to omit the anecdote, merely to please Mr. Cooper, because Captain Perry had thus expressed in general terms the heroic conduct of Yarnell, whom he left upon deck in command of his tattered ship when he boarded the Niagara?

Cooper ranges the witnesses of the Lawrence and Niagara in two columns, and exultingly calls the attention of the reader to the greater length of the latter list, although he knew, and must have felt when he wrote it, that this difference in the length of the two columns was owing to the fact that many officers of the Lawrence were killed, and none in the Niagara; that Elliot obtained their certificates immediately whilst under his command and influence, and that Perry's officers were never applied to for years after, when some were dead and others scattered, and none of them under his command. Was it honorable and ingenuous in Cooper to wink out of sight these palpable reasons for the different length of the two columns of officers, and exult over the Niagara's list as decisive of the controversy in Elliot's favor, when the disparity in numbers of survivors resulted from Elliot's failing to bear his part in the action?

But granting for the sake of the argument, that the officers of the Lawrence were partisan witnesses;—that her doctor went on board the Niagara and put leading questions to the wounded, for the purpose of disparaging Captain Elliott;—that he was a native of Rhode-Island, and accompanied Perry to the lakes;—that he made out a false return of the wounded,—all which is untrue,—but granting it, and that he is unworthy of belief, and that the other officers of the Lawrence are equally so, and admitting on the other hand that the testimony of the

Niagara's officers is equally unreliable from partisan feeling, and thus balancing one against the other so as to neutralize both, and how then stands the evidence? The commanders of the other vessels of the squadron testify that Elliot did not sustain his part in the action, that he held back from engaging his antagonist two hours. If said in reply, and Cooper has said it, that these officers were partial to Perry, then refer the question to other arbitrators who were entire strangers to both Perry and Elliot, who were eye-witnesses of the battle, and Cooper was not one,—to the British officers, who could have felt no interest on either side, for no controversy had yet commenced,—consider too that Barclay had the strongest possible motives to describe the battle accurately, since the least deviation from truth from whatever influence, must place his honor and reputation ever after at the mercy of his officers, and then ask what was their decided opinion on this important subject. Commodore Barclay says in his official report,—

"About 10 o'clock the enemy had cleared the Islands,—and immediately bore up, under easy sail, in a line abreast, each brig being also supported by the small vessels. At a quarter before 12 I commenced the action by a few long guns; about a quarter past 12, the American Commodore, also supported by two schooners, came close to action with the Detroit; the other brig of the enemy," (the Niagara,) "apparently destined to engage the Queen Charlotte, kept so far to windward as to render the Queen Charlotte's carronades useless, while she was with the Lady Prevost, exposed to the destructive fire of the Caledonia and four other schooners armed with heavy long guns." * * *

"The action continued with great fury until half past two, when I perceived my opponent drop astern, and a boat passing from him to the Niagara, (which vessel was at this time perfectly fresh;) the American Commodore seeing that as yet the day was against him, (his vessel having struck soon after he left her) and also the very defenceless state of the Detroit, which ship was now a perfect wreck, principally from the raking fire of the gun-boats, and also that the Queen Charlotte was in such a situation, that I could receive very little assistance from her, and the Lady Prevost being at this time too far to leeward, from her rudder being injured, he" (that is, Perry,) "made a noble, and alas! too successful effort to regain the day, for he bore up, and supported by his small vessels, passed within pistol shot, and took a raking position on our bow; nor could I prevent it, as the unfortunate situation of the Queen prevented our wearing; in attempting it we fell on board her. My gallant first Lieutenant, Garland, was now mortally wounded, and myself so severely that I was obliged to quit the deck. * * Every officer, commanding vessels, and their seconds, was either killed or wounded." * * In conclusion, he adds: "Captain Perry has behaved in a humane and most attentive manner, not only to myself and officers, but to all the wounded."

Barclay you perceive tells the whole story, in all that is material to this controversy, just as Perry told it in *his* official report, with the exception of that part wherein Perry tries to save

Elliot's reputation; for which friendly act Elliot never forgave him, and Perry had reason never to forgive himself.

In addition to all this, the officers of the Queen Charlotte did, in my hearing, and as Chaplain Breese testifies, did in the hearing of himself and others, when they were asked why their ship did not engage her antagonist the Niagara instead of firing upon the Lawrence, state again and again that the Niagara kept so far astern and off to the windward that their guns could not reach her.

Let us glance then at the prominent points in the case. 1st, Elliot had his station and duty assigned him, to fight the Queen Charlotte. Did he perform that duty faithfully? Commodore Perry says *no*:—Commodore Barclay says *no*:—The officers of the Queen say *no*:—The commanders of the small vessels say *no*:—The wounded of the Lawrence, while weltering in their blood said *no*:—But J. Fennimore Cooper, who was not in the action, says *yes*, and from the obliquity that marks what he has written on the subject, his mistakes, mistatements, and false assumptions, such a decision is perfectly in keeping with his character. 2nd: If Elliot was in his place, and performed his duty, and shared in the danger, how are we to account for the fact that he had only three men killed and wounded, when the Lawrence had eighty-three, each ship having one hundred and one men when the battle began? and how was it that the Niagara was a perfectly fresh ship (as the British Commodore states) after the Lawrence was a complete wreck?

Commodore Barclay on his return to England, after officially reporting his defeat and capture, was subjected to the customary ordeal of a Court of Inquiry, and was honorably acquitted.—The published report of proceedings stated that when Perry approached the Niagara in a boat, "she was making away" from the fight, and this was copied into some American papers. A Court of Inquiry was in session at the time in New-York, on some captains who had lost American ships of war, and Elliot, unable to withstand this English version of the action, applied to the Secretary of the Navy to permit this Court to examine the evidence of his conduct, in order to decide, not whether he held back from his station in the action, as several affidavits

state, but whether he attempted to run away. Five witnesses were summoned from the Niagara, and two from the Lawrence. They all testified that he was not running away. But the attempt he then made to draw proofs from them that he did his duty in the action, was less successful. The two from the Lawrence testified adversely.

In the finding of the Court, it was regretted that contradictory testimony was given, but finally concluded that "the Niagara was not running away from her antagonist the Queen, but that she ran away from the Niagara," (*why didn't he run after her ?*) "and that Commodore Perry's official report was correct." It is to be borne in mind that none of the commanders of the small vessels, nor the Commodore were summoned before the Court. The testimony of the two officers adverse to Elliot is disposed of by Cooper in a summary manner. "Mr. Forrest" he says "was a man of very feeble capacity, as was Mr. Yarnell, the other Lieutenant." Now, both were brave and intelligent officers, and had behaved gallantly in other actions; but being dead when Cooper wrote his pamphlet, he felt it safe to stultify them in order to prop the reputation of Elliot.

There is a singular perverseness in the course pursued by Mr. Cooper, in his assaults upon the memory and hard earned fame of the lamented Perry. The few pages of his naval history appropriated to this victory, contain many palpable errors. They however exhibit two prominent traits. 1st: the mistakes are all made to tell against Perry and in favor of Elliot; secondly, that their general aim is to diminish the glory reflected by the victory on American valor and naval skill, by making our fleet a vastly superior force to the enemy's. I have not time to exhibit the numerous instances showing this tendency, but you will find some of them stated in McKenzie's Life of Perry, one of the best pieces of Biography ever written in this country. But after a lapse of years, when McKenzie had exposed the unfairness of his naval history, Cooper writes in Graham's Magazine what he calls *a Life of Perry*, in which he aims his missiles at the character of that hero, not only in respect to Lake Erie matters, but to the subsequent events of his life, particularly in the Mediterranean, where Perry in a moment of excite-

ment, occasioned by what he deemed an insult offered by his Marine officer, Captain Heath, gave him a blow with his fist, in atonement for which, and because he had violated the rules of the service, he exposed his life to a shot from Heath without raising his own pistol in return. Cooper insinuates that in this instance of giving a blow, Perry was intoxicated. The insinuation is groundless. I was in the ship at the time, and knew all the particulars. The act proceeded from a sudden burst of passion under what seemed to him a great provocation. Perry, although he habitually strove to control his temper, was not always successful, and it was the only fault I ever found in him. But what shall be said of Mr. Cooper, who, because McKenzie criticised his Naval History and exposed its unfairness, sought revenge by aspersing the fame of a deceased hero, who had never injured him, and whose fame was among the precious jewels, not only of Rhode-Island but of the nation, and to throw his arrows into the hearts of a bereaved family.

If you ask for further probable motives that actuated Mr. Cooper in making his attack upon the character of Perry, a passage taken from his strange pamphlet, printed not long before his decease, and distributed by Captain Elliot among the members of Congress, may assist in the disentanglement of his motives. "He has seen his own work" he says, (referring to his Naval History) "condemned, and, so far as the public authorities were concerned, excluded from the district school libraries, and all on account of its supposed frauds in relation to the battle on Lake Erie; while, on the other hand, he has heard Captain McKenzie's biography of Perry lauded from one end of the Union to the other, and preferred to that place in the libraries mentioned, from which his own work has been excluded." This fact was too much for his arrogant spirit to bear; it rankled in his bosom until his spleen found vent in this pamphlet.

I can conceive of no other motive for his conduct, unless it were the promise of a silver medal from Elliot, which he is known to have received, and which bore on one side the head of Cooper surrounded by these words, "*The personification of Honor, Truth and Justice.*"

Elliot had the impudence to send one of these medals to this

Historical Society, which was rejected, and returned with a preamble and resolutions expressed in the following words.

"Whereas we honor the character and cherish the memory of Commodore Oliver H. Perry, and hold in high admiration, the professional skill, heroic valor, and noble conduct, shown by him in the battle of Lake Erie, on the 10th of September, 1813, by which he achieved a victory glorious to the American arms, and gained a name which to us, as citizens of his native State, is a source of honest pride; and whereas in the published writings of J. Fenimore Cooper, Esquire, relative to that event, he has labored to establish opinions which we can neither adopt nor sanction, and whereas justice requires that this body shall not do or participate in any act which may imply its acquiescence in the efforts which have been made in behalf of Commodore Elliot, to establish for him a reputation derogatory to the just fame of his deceased Commander.

It is therefore Resolved, that the Society declines accepting the medal which has been presented in the name of Commodore Elliot;" and they ordered it to be returned through the channel by which it was received.

Fiction had employed so much of Mr. Cooper's time and attention, that he was unable to state matters of fact without drawing on his imagination in such a way as to distort them into a conformity to his prejudices. He early in life exhibited a dogged obstinacy of opinion, that made him appear absurd and paradoxical. Contradiction of his opinions, however wild, was not to be endured. Captain McKenzie exposed his errors and misstatements. He was responded to in the vituperative language contained in the abusive pamphlet before noticed. The pamphlet however fell still-born from the press.

I never knew that such a piece of absurdity was in being until I commenced this discourse. In the first three pages I find six misstatements. Yet it was for this pamhlet that Elliot presented the medal *"to the personifier of honor, truth and justice,"* and which this society rejected. In return, Cooper seeks revenge by a missile thrown at this society, inserted in the preface to one of the early volumes of his last edition, and published a few months only before his death.

It is a curious fact that with all his assaults upon Perry, not a word is said to the disadvantage of Elliot, not an allusion is made to his misconduct in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.—On the contrary he is everywhere lauded of as a paragon of noble qualities, as an immaculate hero, although at the very time Cooper was concocting this strange pamphlet, Elliot was undergoing a punishment of four years suspension without pay, under sentence of a Court Martial, on charges proved against him, of a

disgraceful character: Yet, neither these nor any other scandalous acts of Elliot are even hinted at by "the *personifier of honor, truth and justice.*"

Mr. Cooper remarks that a striking characteristic of the Battle of the Lake is the bitter controversy that ensued in respect to the conduct of the two senior commanders. And who, let me ask, but himself is chargeable with blame for it? He was not a party interested. His meddling with it was gratuitous and uncalled-for. With Elliot the case was different. The public believed him to have failed in his duty, and to have tarnished his character, and it was natural for him to plead *not guilty* before the bar of public opinion, to flounce and flounder, and strive to clear himself. But with Cooper the case was different. He seems to have entered the controversy purely from love of it.—He strives to save Elliot by disparaging Perry, and from his pen has flown more ink and bile than has been shed by all others. Much as Elliot's conduct deserves censure, Cooper's is more reprehensible. He enters the lists unnecessarily, and purely from love of paradox and thirst for notoriety, unless it were a prospect of gaining a medal.

I am well aware that there is little honor gained by striking at a dead man, and therefore wish that Mr. Cooper were living to hear me. But if he while living labored assiduously to create in the public mind false and injurious impressions against the illustrious dead, who had never given him provocation; if he strove to tarnish the pure character and fame of Commodore Perry, the rich but only legacy left to a bereaved family, and to rob this State and the nation of the glory gained for them on Lake Erie, then it is not only excusable but the bounden duty of one who was an eye-witness of the doings on the Lake, to correct public opinion, by expunging from their minds the aspersions of a calumniator, whether he be dead or alive.

Am I accused of severity upon Mr. Cooper, in the foregoing strictures? Read his pamphlet,—his abuse of all who testify under oath concerning the relative conduct of the two commanders, favorably to Perry;—his vituperative attacks upon Capt. M'Kenzie and others who had reviewed the evidence, and placed the whole controversy in a fair light, and his impotent

growls at this Society, for rejecting the proffered medal of himself, and you will decide differently; for not a tithe of his offensive misstatements and perversions could receive notice in the brief hour allotted me on this occasion.

I know of nothing that should incline me to favor one Commander more than the other. Certainly there had been no reason to complain of ill-treatment from either, personally. Nor was there any professional jealousy existing among the medical officers of the squadron. The other two were ill, and under treatment, and I have never heard that either of them pretended to have rendered any assistance to the wounded after the battle closed. It was immaterial to me therefore, who fought valiantly or who failed in his duty, as I was a non-combatant. The care of ninety-six wounded devolved on me, and the honor or dishonor of performing my duty faithfully or otherwise, was the same whether they were wounded in the Lawrence or Niagara, —under Perry or under Elliot.

A few remarks on the character of Commodore Perry must conclude this Discourse, already too long. I have alluded to his being passionate under provocation, aside from which he was the most exemplary officer I ever knew. Possessed of high-toned moral feeling, he was above the low dissipation and sensuality that many officers of his day were prone to indulge in. His conversation was remarkably free from profanity and indelicacy, and in his domestic character he was a model of every domestic virtue and grace. His acquirements were respectable. On the subjects of history and the drama he was well read, and had formed opinions that evinced patient thought. He wrote with remarkable facility and in good taste. Trained under the experienced teachings of his father and Commodore Rodgers, he could not fail of perfection in seamanship and naval discipline. "Every germ of merit in his officers was sure to be discovered and encouraged by him, and no opportunity was ever lost of advancing those who performed their duty with cheerfulness and fidelity." He was the most remarkable man I ever saw for success in inspiring his officers with a reverential awe in his presence, and with a dread of giving him offence. Generous to the full extent of his means, his elegant hospitality es-

pecially on ship-board in foreign ports, reflected great honor on our Navy. Distinguished visitors ever found his ship in most perfect order, and left her with exalted opinions of his graceful and dignified manners, and of the strict discipline prevailing among his officers and men.

I feel grateful to my audience for their patient attention.—Nearly forty years have rolled away, since Perry gained the memorable victory,—the first one ever gained over a squadron by this Country, and with the lapse of time have passed away most of those who were with him. Of the nine commanders of vessels, only one survives; and of the fifteen officers of the Lawrence, only Capt. Taylor and myself remain. The thought reminds me, as it should do, that my own summons cannot be far distant. Entertaining the opinions I honestly do of the incidents and events of the battle, and of the chief actors in it,—opinions which were formed on the spot at the time; and also of the controversy that long after ensued, I have for years felt it an imperative duty to present those opinions to the citizens of this State on some appropriate occasion. That duty, by your appointment has been performed, so far as the brief time allotted would permit, and with it has been offered a tribute of respect due to the character of the illustrious son of Rhode-Island.—Ever may his memory remain enshrined in the hearts of the people of his native state, and of a grateful nation!

APPENDIX.

AMERICAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT.

No. 1.

Copy of a letter from Commodore Perry to the Secretary of the Navy.

U. S. Schooner Ariel, Put-in-Bay,
13th September, 1813.

Sir—In my last I informed you, that we had captured the enemy's fleet on this lake. I have now the honor to give you the most important particulars of the action. On the morning of the 10th inst. at sun rise, they were discovered from Put-in-Bay, where I lay at anchor with the squadron under my command. We got under way, the wind light at S. W. and stood for them. At 10 A. M. the wind hauled to S. E. and brought us to windward; formed the line and brought up. At 15 minutes before 12, the enemy commenced firing; at 5 minutes before 12, the action commenced on our part. Finding their fire very destructive, owing to their long guns, and its being mostly directed to the Lawrence, I made sail, and directed the other vessels to follow, for the purpose of closing with the enemy. Every brace and bow line being shot away, she became unmanageable, notwithstanding the great exertions of the Sailing Master. In this situation she sustained the action upwards of two hours, within canister shot distance, until every gun was rendered useless, and a greater part of the crew either killed or wounded. Finding she could no longer annoy the enemy, I left her in charge of Lt. Yarnell, who I was convinced, from the bravery already displayed by him, would do what would comport with the honor of the flag. At half-past 2, the wind springing up *Captain Elliot was enabled to bring his vessel*, the Niagara, gallantly into close action; I immediately went on board of her, when he anticipated my wish by volunteering to bring the schooners, which had been kept astern by the lightness of the wind, into close action. It was with unspeakable pain that I saw, soon after I got on board the Niagara, the flag of the Lawrence come down, although I was perfectly sensible that she had been defended to the last, and that to have continued to make a show of resistance would have been a wanton sacrifice to the remains of her brave crew. But the enemy was not able to take possession of her, and circumstances soon permitted her flag again to be hoisted. At 45 minutes past two, the signal was made for "close action." The Niagara being *very little injured*, I determined to pass through the enemy's line, bare up and pass ahead of their two ships and a brig, giving a raking

fire to them from the starboard guns and to a large schooner and sloop, from the larboard side, at half pistol shot distance. The smaller vessels at this time having got within grape and canister distance, under the direction of Capt. Elliot, and keeping up a well-directed fire, the two ships, a brig, and a schooner surrendered, a schooner and sloop making a vain attempt to escape.

Those officers and men who were immediately under my observation, evinced the greatest gallantry, and I have no doubt that all others conducted themselves as became American officers and seamen. Lieutenant Yarnel, first of the Lawrence, although several times wounded, refused to quit the deck. Midshipman Forest, (doing duty as Lieutenant,) and Sailing-Master Taylor were of great assistance to me. I have great pain in stating to you the death of Lieutenant Brooks of the marines, and Midshipman Laub, both of the Lawrence, and Midshipman John Clark, of the Scorpion; they were valuable officers. Mr. Hambleton, Purser, who volunteered his services on deck, was severely wounded late in the action. Midshipmen Claxton and Swartwout, of the Lawrence, were severely wounded. On board the Niagara, Lieutenants Smith and Edwards, and Midshipman Webster, (doing duty as Sailing Master,) behaved in a very handsome manner. Captain Brevoort, of the army, who acted as a volunteer in the capacity of a marine officer on board that vessel, is an excellent and brave officer, and with his musketry, did great execution. Lieut. Turner, commanding the Caledonia, brought that vessel into action in the most able manner, and is an officer, that in all situations may be relied upon. The Ariel, Lieut. Packet, and Scorpion, Sailing Master Champlin, were enabled to get early into the action, and were of great service. Capt. Elliot speaks in the highest terms of Mr. Magrath, Purser, who had been despatched in a boat on service, previous to my getting on board the Niagara; and being a seaman, since the action has rendered essential service in taking charge of one of the prizes. Of Capt. Elliot, already so well known to the government, it would be almost superfluous to speak. In this action he evinced his characteristic bravery and judgment, and since the close of the action, has given me the most able and essential assistance.

I have the honor to enclose you a return of the killed and wounded, together with a statement of the relative force of the squadrons. The Captain and First Lieut. of the Queen Charlotte, and First Lieut. of the Detroit, were killed. Capt. Barclay, senior officer, and the commander of the Lady Prevost, severely wounded. Their loss in killed and wounded, I have not yet been able to ascertain; it must, however, have been very great.

Very respectfully, I have the honor to be,
Sir, your obedient servant,

O. H. PERRY.

The Hon. Wm. Jones,
Secretary of the Navy.

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